

Message Text

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ACTION A-01

INFO OCT-01 EA-04 ADP-00 H-01 M-03 SS-02 NSC-04 SSO-00

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FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

TO AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE IMMEDIATE

SECSTATE WASHDC 0793

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 PHNOM PENH 3230

LIMDIS

VIENTIANE PASS SENATOR BROOKE

E. O. 11652 GDS

TAGS: PGYMJRNS CB

SUBJ: SENATOR BROOKS' S CONVERSATIONS WITH SIRIK MATAK AND
OTHER OPPOSITION LEADERS

1. SUMMARY. IN A 1-3/4 HOUR MEETING WITH SIRIK MATAK
ON THE AFTERNOON OF MARCH 5 AND IN PRIVATE CONVERSATION
WITH REPUBLICAN LEADER SENG BUNG KORN AND DEMOCRATIC
LEADER HEY KANTHOUL AFTER DINNER THAT EVENING, SENATOR
BROOKE EXPLORED IN DETAIL THE POLITICAL OPPOSITIN' S
VIEWS OF THE CURRENT SITUATION. SIRIK MATAK SHOWED
LITTLE OF THE BITTERNESS CHARACTERIZING HIS EARLIER
INTERVIEW WITH NYT REPORTER KAMM AND EXPRESSED WILLINGNESS
TO WORK WITH LON NOL. ALL OF THE OPPOSITION LEADERS
AGREED, HOWEVER, THAT AN ALTERANTIVE TO THE PRESENTLEADERSHIP
MUST
SOON BE FOUND IF THE GOVERNMENT IS TO REGAIN THE
CONFIDENCE OF THE PEOPLE. THEY COULD NOT, ON THE OTHER
HAND, COME UP WITH A GOVERNING FORMULA OR THE PERSONALITIES
WHO WOULD CONSTITUTE A SUITABLE ALTERNATIVES. THE FOLLOWING
HIGHLIGHTS WERE RECALLED BY THE EMBASSY OFFICER SERVING AS INTER-
PRETER DURING THESE MEETINGS (NO NOTES WERE TAKEN) AND HAVE NOT
BEEN CLEARED BY THE SENATOR. END SUMMARY.

2. SENATOR BROOKE OPENED THE COVERSAATION WITH SIRIK MATAK
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BY EXPLAINING HIS INTEREST IN OBTAINING ALL POSSIBLE INFORMATION ON THE CAMBODIAN SITUATION IN LIGHT OF CURRENT CONCERN IN THE UNITED STATE REGARDING AN AMERICAN INVOLVEMENT IN THE WAR IN CAMBODIA. SENATOR BROOKE CITED IN THIS RESPECT CRITICISM ON THE AMERICAN AIR STRIKES AND OF B-52 RAIDS IN PARTICULAR. SIRIK MATAK SAID HE TOO OPPOSED B-52 RAIDS AS THEY ARE NOT BEING FOLLOWED UP BY GROUND ACTION.

3. SIRIK MATAK SAID HE IS NOT UNDER HOUSE ARREST. HIS GUARDS WERE GREATLY AUGMENTED IN NUMBER, HIS TELEPHONE WAS CUT FOR A SHORT PERIOD AND HE WAS ASKED TO RESTRICT THE NUMBER OF HIS VISITORS DURING THE DAYS IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE MARCH 17 EVENTS. HE NOW MAY GO WHEREVER HE WISHES BUT LIMITS HIS MOVEMENTS TO SAVE HIS GUARDS TROUBLE. SIRIK MATAK POINTED OUT THAT HIS SON, WHO WAS PRESENT FOR THE CONVERSATION, IS RESTRICTED TO THE HOUSE BUT THIS MEASURE, HE EXPLAINED, HAS BEEN APPLIED TO ALL MILITARY MEMBERS OF THE ROYAL FAMILY, AND HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH THE FAMILY- SON RELATIONSHIP.

4. SIRIK MATAK SAW SO PHOTRA'S ATTACK ON THE PALACE AS AN ISOLATED, SPONTANEOUS ACTION CAUSED BY HIS HAVING SEEN HIS SISTER WOUNDED BY A GRENADE THROWN BY A LON NON MAN DURING THE MARCH 17 FRACAS AT THE FACULTY OF PEDAGOGY. SIRIK MATAK BELIEVED LON NOL KNOWS THAT REPORTS OF A PLOT ARE UNTRUE. THE ARREST OF THE ROYAL FAMILY IS WITHOUT FOUNDATION, SIRIK MATAK, CONTINUED, NOTING THAT THE QUEEN MOTHER CANNOT NOW GET UP FROM HER ARMCHAIR AND IS GUILTY ONLY OF CONTINUED SENTIMENT FOR HER SON. SIRIK MATAK SAID ONE HUNDRED TEACHERS AND AN UNKNOWN NUMBER OF STUDENTS HAVE BEEN ARRESTED. AS A CONSEQUENCE OF THE GOVERNMENT'S REPRESSIVE ACTION IN WAKE OF THE MARCH 17 EVENTS, MANY STUDENTS HAVE ALSO GONE OVER TO THE OTHER SIDE, SIRIK MATAK CLAIMED.

5. ASKED TO EXPLAIN THE ORIGINS OF HIS SPLIT WITH LON NOL, SIRIK MATAK SAID THE DIVERGENCE IN THEIR VIEWPOINTS BEGAN IN THE MILITARY FIELD WHEN HIS RECOMMENDATION THAT THE CHENLA II OPERATIONS NOT PROCEED BEYOND KOMPONG THMAR WAS REJECTED WITH DISASTROUS CONSEQUENCES TO THE ARMY. SIRIK MATAK ALSO DISAGREED WITH LON NOL'S HASTY EFFORTS TO ESTABLISH REPUBLICAN INSTITUTIONS AND HOLD A SERIES OF ELECTIONS, WHICH HE BELIEVED DETRACTED FROM THE MAIN TASK OF FIGHTING THE VIETNAMESE COMMUNISTS. IN THE ECONOMIC FIELD, SIRIK MATAK SAID LON NOL

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HAD NOT SUPPORTED HIS EFFORTS TO ESTABLISH CAREFUL, RATIONAL PLANNING WITH THE RESULT THAT U. S. ASSISTANCE HAS IN MANY INSTANCES FED CORRUPTION. AT A LATER POINT IN THE CONVERSATION, SIRIK MATAK ALSO CRITICIZED THE " MILITARISM" OF THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT, DEPLORING THE NUMBER OF MINISTERS AND PROVINCE CHIEFS WHO ARE MILITARY OFFICERS. FINALLY, SIRIK MATAK SAID THE PRESIDENT, WHO AT THE BEGINNING CONCERTED HIS ACTIONS WITH HIS CLOSE ASSOCIATES, HAS NOW RESORTED TO SOLITARY RULE, SIRIK MATAK EMPHASIZED THAT THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HIM AND THSSMARSHAL ARE OVER GOVERNING CONCEPTS AND THAT THEIR BASIC FRIENDSHIP HAS NOT BEEN SEVERED.

6. SIRIK MATAK VOLUNTEERED THAT HE HAD TOLD NYT CORRESPONDENT HENRY KAMM THAT SIHANOUK IS MORE POPULAR WITH THE KHMER THAN THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT BUT HIS REMARK WAS IN RESPONSE TO A QUESTION AND WITHOUT ELABORATION. ALTHOUGH THERE IS NOSTALGIA AMONG THE OLDER KHMER, SIHANOUK IS NOW " DEPASSE", BECAUSE HE WENT TO PEKING AND SUPPORTED THE VIETNAMESE INVASION OF HIS COUNTRY, SIRIK MATAK CONTINUED. SENG BUN KORN GAVE ROUGHLY THE SAME EVALUATION OF SIHANOUK'S FUTURE ROLE DURING THE EVENING CONVERSATION. HUY KANTHOUL SAID SIHANOUK STILL ENJOYS SUPPORT IN THE COUNTRYSIDE AND EVEN AMONG CERTAIN ELEMENTS OF THE PHNOMPENH POPULATION BUT HAS NONE AMONG THE INTELLECTUALS (IN WHICH CATEGORY HE SEEMED TO PLACE DEMOCRATIC PARTY MEMBERS)

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S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 PHNOM PENH 3230

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (P A R A . 11.)

7. SIRIK MATAK CHARACTERIZED THE MORALE OF THE POPULATION IN GENERAL AND OF THE MILITARY IN PARTICULAR AS VERY POOR.

AS AN ASIDE HE NOTED THAT HIS GUARDS HAD NOT BEEN RECENTLY PAID. THE SENATOR ASKED HOW LONG CAMBODIA MIGHT LAST IN THE UNLIKELY EVENT THAT U. S. ASSISTANCE IS WITHDRAWN. SIRIK MATAK REPLIED " ABOUT ON MONTH".

8. ASKED WHETHER LON NOL HAS THE INTELLECTUAL AND MORAL CAPABILITY TO GOVERN THE NATION, SIRIK MATAK SAID HE ONCE HAD THESE QUALITIES BUT THEY DISAPPEARED AFTER HIS STROKE. (HEY KANTHOUL ALSO SAW LON NOL' S STROKE AS THE TURNING POINT, NOTING THAT HE EVOLED ENTHUSIASTIC SUPPORT BEFORE THAT TIME.) LON NOL NO LONGER GOVERNS FOR THE PEOPLE BUT FOR A SMALL GROUP OF INTIMATES, SIRIK MATAK SAID. WHEN THE SENATOR REFERRED TO THE MARSHAL' S RELIANCE ON HIS BROTHER, SIRIK MATAK SAID THIS IS LON NOL' S " GRAVEST FAULT."

9. THE SENATOR ASKED SIRIK MATAK WHETHER THE OPPOSITION PARTIES SOUGHT POWER. THE LATTER REPLIED THAT NONE OF THE OPPOSITION LEADERS WISH TO BE PRESIDENT AND THAT IN TAM RAN FOR THAT OFFICE ONLY TO DEMONSTRATE TO LON NOL THAT HE DID NOT HAVE THE COUNTRY UNANIMOUSLY BEHIND HIM. SIRIK MATAK RECOUNTED THE MOVES IN WHICH THE PRESIDENT OFFERED AND HE ACCEPTED THE FICE PRESIDENCY UNDER CERTAIN CONDITIONS WHICH LON NOL THOUGHT REASONABLE BUT WHICH NON NON MANAGED TO SEE REJECTED. HE SID HE WAS STILL WAITING FOR LON NOL' S RESPONSE TO HIS
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LAJIC AND RAJACIC WOULD LIKE TO MEET WITH DR. GUYFORD STEVER, DIRECTOR OF NSF, WHILE IN WASHINGTON.

5. EMBASSY FULLY AGREES WITH DEPARTMENT' S GENERAL APPROACH TO MEETINGS AS OUTLINED IN REFTEL B.

6. EMBASSY ASSESSMENT OF LIKELY SIZE OF YUGOSLAV CONTRIBUTIONS WILL FOLLOW SEPTTEL, AFTER FURTHER SOUNDINGS.
TOON

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